

The Agency – Basic Version

This is the Agency basic version. It contains less background information and Director advice than the full version, but all the rules. The full version will be appearing in the Nopress RPG Anthology.

Introduction

The Agency is a roleplaying game where players take on the roles of 60's secret agents fighting the machinations of the supernatural menace. It's *Austin Powers* meets *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or *The Avengers* with Hammer Horror. It's designed to be a simple and light-hearted system, with lots of opportunity for heroics.

This is not an extensive set of rules, they are however designed to *really* convey the feel of the setting. The game is strongly focused on players co-operating to create fun stories of a particular style, and the rules reflect this. It is abstract in comparison to some games, but the purpose of the game is to allow fun to flow from the freedom granted by that abstraction.

The game works best with 4 or so players, and you'll need some dice and paper. A few character sheets (included at the end of the game), are also useful.

About the Agency

It's the 1960s. London hums to the music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. New fashions and lifestyles sweep the nation. With the beginning of the Age of Aquarius, a sinister conspiracy threatens the nation: Abominations of the supernatural are bent on the destruction or enslavement of the human race! The only thing that stands in their way are the plucky agents of the top secret organisation: the Agency.

The Agency began as an obscure sub-department of military intelligence, working as a special operations unit and handed the rather dubious task of investigating weird phenomena. For some fifty years, this small team was all that protected the country from the horrors of the night. The last 10 years have seen an alarming upturn in activity by supernatural creatures of all kinds. This has led to the home office expanding the original team and officially establishing The Agency.

The remit of this organisation is quite simple: uncover any supernatural threat to the nation and eliminate it. To avoid public outcry, the Agency is tasked with doing its work as quietly as possible; witnesses are to be recruited. This policy has resulted in a strange assortment of characters being members of the agency. Millionaire playboys, military men and rock stars all secretly work for the Agency. These Agents are organised into small teams, called together should need arise, and backed up by a staff of scientists and support personnel.

The Agency has its headquarters in rural Sussex, hidden behind the façade of a rather nice Jacobean mansion. The area directly around Agency H.Q. is used for training, and new recruits can often be seen practising martial arts and assault courses in the grounds. Several hundred metres below the ground, the Agency operates an experimental containment facility, where "neutralised" supernatural creatures can be safely stored and monitored.

Playing the Game

To play the Agency, you'll need some normal dice and some players (3-5 is about right) and somebody to act as Director. If you have not played in a roleplaying game before, this role may need some explanation. The Director is a player who is responsible for organising play, setting the

scene, conceiving plot and describing the actions of non-player characters. Where the players will create characters who are the heroes of the piece, the Director will set the scene for that story and play the bit parts, allies and villains. There is more discussion of this role later on.

Typically play will begin with the Director describing a scene and then continue with players describing how their characters react to events. Their decisions, and suggestions, will lead to a changes in the scene and the development of the plot. The events may be dramatic chase scenes, brawls with supernatural creatures, or acts of death-defying heroism. The object of the game is to have fun by creating an enjoyable story. Rules help frame the action in a manageable way and encourage the conventions of the action genre. Plus the dice add an element of the unforeseen to the experience

Character Creation

Each player in the game creates a character whose actions they will guide during the game. Character Creation is easy, the first step is to come up with a suitable concept. Keep in mind the influences of the game. Remember all those TV spy series from the 60s and 70s: which cool characters from them would you want to be?

Characters will have a normal life and an Agency life, and so typical concepts might include: International playboy, rock star, photographer, military specialist, spy, cat burglar, scientist, mystic guru, martial artist, fashion model. Also pick a name for your character at this point, it should be something evocative of the setting. Note down a few details about the character's look and mannerisms.

If you have trouble with creating a character concept, then consider the following questions: What do you see your character doing, and what is cool about it? What is your character's purpose? how will they go about achieving this? What does your character think about the Agency? What are your character's distinctive personality traits? What does he or she look like? what amazing fashions does he or she wear?

Choose skills

Skills are abilities at which your character has some talent. Skills are used in the game to determine chance of success at particular actions during moments of dramatic tension. Skills have five different levels: Poor means you aren't very good at something, Normal means your character has a layman's understanding of a skill, Fair is slightly better than a normal person, Good is trained and Excellent is a truly heroic level of expertise. The final level of skill is Normal, to which all skills default if you aren't especially bad or good at them.

Examples of skills include: **Science, Kung Fu, Brawling, Melee, Acrobatics, Seduction, Guns, Languages, Intimidation, Persuasion, Investigation, Medicine, Driving, Security, Survival, Stealth, Observation, Music, Riding, Athletics, Dodging and Intimidation.** This is by no means an exhaustive list, and you have total control over what your skill is called, as long as you can get your Director to agree. Pick whatever you think suits your character concept.

All players in the game start by picking 2 skills in which their character is good and 1 skill in which they are excellent. Also choose one area in which your character has a poor skill, nobody has a perfect knowledge base after all.

You can also choose to take an extra skill at poor, to gain an extra skill at fair.

Choose bonuses and flaws

Bonuses and flaws are the things that make your character stand out--natural strengths and weaknesses, social contacts both good and bad--the things that bring a character to life. In a game of The Agency, no two characters should have an identical set of bonuses and flaws.

A heroic flaw is something about your character that is not perfect, which may occasionally make him act in an inappropriate, but all too human, way. Examples include, but are not limited to:

Proud, Lustful, Gambler, Drinker, Reckless, Vengeful, Cowardly, Soft Hearted, Obsessive, Addicted, Violent, Forgetful, Clumsy, Gullible, Frail.

Each character also has a heroic bonus, something that sets the character apart in a positive way. Heroic bonuses are aspects of a character that are not covered by skills but nevertheless have a huge impact on events. These include, but are not limited to: **Wealth, Contacts, Influence, Rank, Artefact, Gadget, Toughness, Luck, Mysticism, Quick, Bruiser, Magnetism.**

If you want you can take an extra flaw, you can take an extra bonus too.

Custom Bonuses and Flaws

The default collection of bonuses and flaws is detailed later, but feel free to invent your own if nothing defined fits your concept. All you have to do is decided the name of the trait and the arena that it covers, and get the Director to agree that your idea works.

Bonuses and flaws can be as abstract as you wish, but a good rule of thumb is that they should be quickly summarised, and their effects should not be duplicated by anything else which exists within the system.

Examples of Character Creation

Simon Drake

Simon Drake produced records for a living, until he wound up in the path of an angry vampire who was being chased by the Agency. His timely use of a pool cue as a makeshift weapon brought him into the Agency's ranks. He cuts a dashing figure in the latest fashions and is known to many people in and around the London music scene.

Simon has the skills Music and Brawl at good. He is excellent at Persuasion. He is poor at Science. He has many Contacts from his days as a promoter of bands, but he suffers from a Reckless Streak.

Jenna Styles

Jenna Styles worked as a Fashion Photographer while enjoying the life of a London socialite. She joined the Agency after surviving an unfortunate run in with a zombie cab driver. Nobody had tried decapitating a zombie with a high-heeled boot before.

Jenna has the skills Martial Arts and Photography at good and is an excellent Driver. She has the bonuses Vehicle and Magnetism. She has the flaws Reckless and Soft Hearted.

Game Rules

Karma

Karma plays an important part in The Agency. The law of Karma is very simple: for every good thing which happens, something bad will happen too. In the game Karma is used to arbitrate a number of aspects of the story. Sometimes a player can choose to take a point of bad Karma. If a player's character has bad Karma, then the Director can cash it in to cause bad things to happen. Similarly the character may gain good Karma, and choose to spend it to power his Bonuses. The character sheet has a bar to indicate the current state of your character's Karma. Since it moves up and down I'd recommend using a glass bead or token that you can move up and down the scale.

We'll cover more precise uses of Karma later. For now the most important thing to remember is: **In matters of Karma, the Director is always the final arbitrator.** That is to say they say yes and no to your requests as a player to give your character Karma.

Action rolls

Whenever a character tries to achieve an action that will change the course of the plot, the controlling player makes an **action roll**. You don't roll for everything, just for those actions that are important to the progression of the story. Usually the Director will tell you when you need to roll. You wouldn't need to roll for driving a car across London, but you would need to roll to avoid crashing into innocent bystanders as you drive through Camden Market after a werewolf. **The key thing to remember is: When an action roll is made, the outcome of events will always be in the balance.**

Action rolls follow this simple procedure: Roll a number of dice, based on how good your character is at a relevant skill (see below table). Each roll of 5 or 6 is a success, and if you get at least one success, you succeed! Some situations will reduce the number of dice you can roll, but a character can never have less than one die

Skill Level	Dice
Poor	1
Normal	2
Fair	3
Good	4
Excellent	5

Example: *Simon Drake is trying to bluff his way into an exclusive fashionable club, which the Director says requires an action. His player rolls 5 dice for excelling at persuasion. He rolls 1, 2, 2, 5, 6, a total of 2 successes.*

Success and failure

Whether you succeed or fail, the result of an action roll should always make the plot interesting. If you fail a roll there will be a plot complication. If you succeed your character will be closer to their goal. Normally it is the Director who describes the results of an action.

However, if a player takes a point of Bad Karma, they can take control of the narrative and describe a particularly cool success happening. The description is limited to the effects of that action, but the player can use this to turn the plot in his character's favour. A special success like this will always give more of an advantage than the normal one.

If a player fails a roll, they can choose to **"take a fall"** and opt to describe a really interesting failure for their character. If the Director thinks it's an interesting enough failure, they'll let you remove a point of Bad Karma. This gives you a chance to decide how the character failed (as long as they do fail), and also to add interesting new twists to the story.

Example of success: Jenna Styles is driving her sports car through Covent Garden after a rampaging werewolf. The director calls for a driving roll to keep on target and avoid pedestrians. Jenna's player succeeds and chooses to take a point of Bad Karma. She narrates her success as skilfully weaving between the pedestrians, narrowly avoiding a performance mime, crashing into the beast and sending it flying back into a wall, stunning it.

Example of failure: Simon Drake is trying to defuse a bomb at an embassy ball. Unfortunately his science skill is poor. His player rolls and fails but decides to 'take the fall'. He describes Simon stressing as he tries to decipher the bomb, then giving up and throwing the device out of the window, hoping that it will detonate in the open and do less damage. Unfortunately, it's landed in an ambassadorial car that is driving away, and the clock is still ticking. The Director thinks this is suitably amusing, so lets Simon's player have a point of Karma back.

Opposed actions, big creatures and ganging up

If an action is opposed by another character, then rolls are made for both and the totals are compared. The character with the greater number of successes wins. If the action is opposed by more than one person, the larger group gets an extra die for each person they have above the other side. A particularly large monster will also get an extra die for actions relating to its size, but one less die in areas where its size is a disadvantage.

Combat

Combat is a common form of action, this is a game about sixties spies fighting an supernatural menace after all! Combat has a few extra rules, to make things interesting and to allow events to flow smoothly.

Awareness

At the start of the combat players roll a die. This is their awareness value, there's a space on the character sheet for keeping track of it. The Director rolls for any villains present. Characters and villains act in awareness order, highest first. Players can add 6 to their awareness if they take a point of bad Karma and can choose to do this after rolling their dice.

Awareness will fluctuate up and down during combat as the character fails or succeeds. Characters whose awareness dips below 0 are said to be *dazed*. Dazed characters get one less die on all action rolls until it rises above 0 again.

Rounds and Actions

In a combat situation, events are divided up into rounds, so that it's easier to work out who is

doing what. Each character can do only one action each round. Actions are taken in order of awareness, highest first. A round is not a set length of time, it's just a game mechanic for splitting things up. The time span could be said to be "as long as it takes to do one cool thing".

If a character's action is to attack a villain, then resisted rolls are made. If the character succeeds, they do damage to the opponent equal to the **total** number of successes. There is more information on damage later.

As with normal actions, players can opt to take bad Karma to describe an exceptional success or nominate to 'take the fall' to gain good Karma. An exceptional success in combat might be disarming an opponent, knocking him over, or hitting a particular part of the body. Taking the fall might mean your character's gun jammed, he lost his weapon, or he slipped on the floor.

Taunts

Taunts are the witty banter that throws your opponent off their guard. To use a taunt, a player sacrifices 1 point of his awareness and comes up with a suitable humorous taunt of his character's opponent. That opponent gets -2 to his awareness. Taunts don't require a roll to succeed, and don't count as actions, but characters are limited to one taunt per round. Yes, this does mean you can taunt your opponent until they are dazed.

Transition

At the end of the round, any character who succeeded in an action adds one to their awareness. Any character who failed takes two off his awareness. When each character has performed their action for a round, a new round starts, unless the combat has reached a natural conclusion. Note: You get a bonus for any successful action, not just the obviously combat related ones.

Damage: Scratches and Wounds

When a blow is landed in combat, a character receives damage. There are two kinds of damage: scratches and wounds. Scratches are minor annoyances, bruises and so on. These are totalled up in the scratches box on the character sheet. When a character's scratches reach a total of 5, then the character takes a wound.

A character has 3 wound boxes. Two are unlabelled and one is labelled "Down." These represent serious wounds that the character has taken in fights. When a wound is taken, tick the box and add a suitable description to the label. If a character is wounded he suffers a penalty to actions, -1 die for each wound.

Normally a Down character cannot act, but players can take a point of bad Karma for their character to act as if only wounded. A character who reaches Down is on the floor and maybe dying. Only medical care can help them recover.

Villains get varying numbers of damage boxes, depending on whether they are a human or supernatural creature. As in the TV series' that inspire the game, villains who reach Down are usually unconscious and will likely get dragged away by their compatriots, the police or an Agency clean-up squad. Supernatural creatures who reach Down will often spontaneously combust in an interesting way.

Characters heal all scratches at the end of the scene. "It's just a scratch" after all. Wounds heal at one per day during rest and recuperation. A character can only be brought back from down by a visit to hospital. Any character with a medical skill can patch up a wound box by making a skill roll.

An Example of Combat

Simon Drake is attacked by one of the evil Dr. Heimlich's goons as he tries to sneak into a warehouse. Player and Director roll awareness. Simon gets 4, the goon gets 6.

The goon's first action is to try and hit Simon. The Director rolls 2 successes, and Simon's player rolls 4. The goon fails, which the director describes as him lurching wildly past Simon.

It's now Simon's chance for an action. Simon's player decides to attack the goon. He gets 4 successes. The Director gets 1 for the Goon (who has no skill in Brawl). Simon does 3 scratches to the Goon.

Now that both combatants have acted, the round ends. Simon gets +1 awareness, The Goon -2.

***A note on damage:** Players of other RPGs will notice that there are no rules for how different weapons do different amounts of damage. There's a reason for this. In the genre of TV the Agency is based upon how much damage a weapon does is almost totally irrelevant. How many times does James Bond remarkably survive a hail of machine gun fire? What matters is how important the enemy in question is to the story, and his skills. To model this, characters who are important to the story have access to bonuses that allow them to take and withstand more damage, along with higher levels of skills.*

Other forms of damage

Not all damage comes from getting hit. Sometimes a character will fall off things, get burned, have things fall on him, get struck by a lightning bolt or have to avoid a large explosion. Normally such forms of damage can be avoided by using a dodging skill against a danger level in dice as if it was an opposing character.

Danger	Suggested Level
Falling from a moving car	3
Falling from a small building	5
Near a car when it explodes	4
Getting hit by falling chunks of masonry	5
Inside a building in early stages of a fire	3
Inside a building in later stages of a fire	6

Car chases

Car chases are the staple of every action series. Car chases (or chases in any other vehicle) are handled using the combat rules shown above. However in chases each car is allotted a **chase value**, which defines how far ahead each vehicle involved in the chase is. At the start of the chase each moving car has D6+1 rolled for its base chase rating. Stationary cars start at 1, no matter what.

One person in each car is designated driver, and must make a successful driving roll every round. If the driver fails this roll, then the chase value drops by 1. If he succeeds it increases by 1. If a chase value drops to below zero, then that car has been forced out of the chase.

If at the start of a round two cars have the same chase rating, then they can ram each other or passengers can attempt to jump between them, punch people, grab each other, and so on.

Actions like these require action rolls as normal. All successful attempts to damage cars with a weapon reduce the target's chase value by 1. Successful ramming attempts reduce the target's chase value by 2.

If vehicles are not at the same chase rating, then only ranged weapons can be used.

Heroic Bonuses and Flaws:

Every time a player states they are using their character's heroic bonus they receive a point of bad Karma. This is noted down, and at some point in the future that Karma may be called in. Bonuses have been kept fairly open to allow players to impact on the story flow quite considerably, but at a price.

Bonuses:

Wealth -Your character is particularly wealthy, and so can afford the types of things that most agents only dream of. Invoke this bonus to spent ridiculous amounts of cash, stay at the most lavish hotels, etc.

***Example:** Reginald Forbes is a particularly wealthy aristocrat. He needs to get to Paris quickly, to avert a disaster as the sorcerer P'Kang attempts to use the Eiffel Tower as a psychic conduit. Reginald invokes his wealth bonus to charter a private jet to France.*

Contacts- Your character knows people, who know information. Invoke this bonus to find out information from one of your many associates. You decide who the person is and what kind of information they know. But the Director will play the NPC.

***Example:** Simon Drake is trying to find out where a secret stash of guns is being brought into the country. He invokes his contacts bonus to find an old friend who's in the know and who points him in the direction of a gang in south London.*

Influence- You know people who can arrange things. This bonus covers political favours, getting things done through non-standard channels and covering things up.

***Example:** The Agency need to hush up strange goings on in the village of Hex Norton. Alfred Pettiforth uses his influence bonus to convince the local paper not to publish the story.*

Rank- You have rank in the Agency, and can use it to get things done. Invoke this bonus to order around subordinates, civilian authorities and other agents.

***Example:** Colonel Sidney Pennington is chasing a dangerous sorcerer across Bodmin Moor, he can't cover the area without help. His player invokes the rank bonus to call in army helicopters to help chase the fugitive.*

Artefact- You have in your possession an ancient mystical artefact with strange powers. Describe the artefact to the director during character creation. Invoke this bonus to use the artefact's powers. You have complete control of what this artefact is. If you take this bonus, you have the option of taking a flaw of 'Artefact problems'.

***Example:** Benni Jones possesses an ancient Welsh artefact, the cup of gwythodd. It possesses the ability to heal people when water is drunk from it. Benni chooses to*

take the Artefact problems flaw, choosing the problem that the water occasionally turns to very potent alcohol.

Gadget- You have access to some of the Agency's more experimental gadgets. Invoke this bonus to acquire usage of one of these items. The player gets to decide what the gadget does. It should be noted that the Agency does not have a very good track record with its devices, and field agents carrying them will often be viewed with suspicion by their peers. Particularly large devices are usually brought in under the control of the Agency's science division. Directors are encouraged to give each device a quirk, that while not making the device useless, makes it's use entertaining....

Example: *Merriweather is investigating a haunting at the British Museum and is at a loss for clues. He radios to base and requests the "Experimental Ectoplasmic Surveillance Grid" (a device the player had just made up). A few minutes later a group of Agency scientists arrive with some powerful static electricity generators wired together and linked to some receiver devices. The scientists explain that ghosts will show up as disruptions in the static. Unfortunately, the large amounts of electrical charge in the air keep earthing themselves through people.*

Toughness- Your character is just naturally tougher than other people. Invoke this bonus to halve the damage from a single blow.

Example: *Harris, a former boxer, knows how to take a punch. A vampire lord throws a wardrobe at him during a particularly vicious fight, doing 6 points of damage. This would normally put the plucky agent out for the count, but his player invokes his toughness bonus to reduce it to 3 points instead.*

Luck- Your character is just plain lucky! Invoke this bonus to give your character surprising good fortune. Luck covers random happen-stance. It will never give results as good as a specified bonus, but provides flexibility other bonuses don't. Any advantage gained from luck should be at least one step removed from the actual aim. It won't let you know who the kidnappers are, but it might mean you happen across a useful clue.

Examples: *Finding an important clue in the rubbish bins of your enemy. Finding an unguarded entrance to the F.E.S.T.A. lair. Your character's girlfriend knowing one of the people you're looking for.*

Mysticism- You know something of strange and occult matters. Invoke this bonus to gain insight into an esoteric subject, perceive supernatural energies or access volumes of occult lore. Optionally it can be invoked to gain strange premonitions.

Example: *Sifu Fung, a master of meditation from Tibet, and his comrades are entering a mysterious temple beneath Chinatown. Ahead on the wall he sees strange mystic symbols etched. He focuses his mind and perceives that a spell is embedded within the symbols.*

Quick Witted- You are particularly quick witted and can invoke this bonus to go first in a combat round. When you invoke this bonus, you always go first in a combat round, 6 higher than any other awareness roll. You may invoke this bonus even after other characters have spent Karma to boost their awareness.

Example: *Jenny Simms is a quick witted journalist. While investigating a mysterious set of murders in the London sewers, she steps through a door, only to be confronted by a pair of zombie alligators. The Director calls for awareness rolls. Jenny's player invokes the quick witted bonus to boost her awareness, choosing her action as stepping quickly back through the door and bolting it before either alligator*

can react.

Bruiser- You are one of nature's thugs, a pillar of muscle power. Invoke this bonus to do 6 extra damage to an opponent when brawling, or to perform an act of superhuman strength.

***Example:** While battling their way from the hidden lair of F.E.S.T.A., Jenny Simms gets trapped beneath a collapsed pillar. Bobby Harris' player invokes his Bruiser bonus to use his last resources of strength to lift the pillar from his friend.*

Signature Weapon- You are particularly suited to using a particular weapon. Invoke this bonus to double the damage done by a particular attack with this weapon.

***Example:** Sifu Fung carries a walking cane. He has trained for years in using this gnarled old stick to defend himself. It is his signature weapon.*

Vehicle- Your character has access to a car, bike or other form of transport. Not only this, but the vehicle in question has any number of *enhancements*. You can invoke this bonus to activate one of these enhancements. You don't have to define what they are until they're needed. They could be weapons, ejector seats, a speed boost, whatever is needed. Such devices will often have an effect on a chase rating, and can alter your character's car's chase rating up by 4 or your opponents down by - 4.

***Example:** Jenna Styles is speeding down the motorway, trying to avoid a group of vampire bikers. She invokes her vehicle bonus to activate the oil slick generator. This reduces the bikers' chase rating to 0, which Jenna's player chooses as causing the bikers to crash off the road.*

Magnetism- Your character is naturally alluring to the opposite sex. They just can't get enough of you. Invoke this bonus to double your successes in any seduction attempt.

***Example:** Jenna Styles needs to find out the location of a Siberian Yeti from the Russian Attaché and decides to seduce him to get the information. Readying her special kinky boots, miniskirt and Chanel XXX, she invokes her bonus for automatic success.*

Advanced Planning- Your character is better prepared than you are. Invoke this bonus to have your character have planned for an unforeseen eventuality.

***Example:** Colonel Masters finds himself alone in Germany with no money and a team of F.E.S.T.A. agents on his tale. He invokes his bonus and picks up the stash of money he stored at the Frankfurt left luggage office for just such an eventuality.*

Flaws

Flaws are somewhat easier to explain. Players can have their character act according to their flaw and build up some good Karma. However, they only gain good Karma if they act according to a flaw in a situation where it is inappropriate or causes disadvantage. An alcoholic drinking when he is in a bar would not gain any Karma, but getting paralytic while on an important diplomatic mission certainly would. It's the Director's responsibility to make sure that the impact of a flaw on the plot is sufficient for it to be worth the Karma.

***Example:** Simon Drake is creeping up to scope out the smugglers. He sees there are 20 of them. Simon's player decides that he'll announce his Reckless flaw coming into play, and will not call for backup. The Director agrees and gives him a point of Karma to use later on.*

Directing

The job of Director is to evoke the world of The Agency, to describe the events in which the player characters become involved, to play the bit parts and the antagonists. It is the Director's responsibility to describe the scene, control the actions of non-player characters, and keep the group focused on the game at hand. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it, and you get to create, and play, loads of interesting characters. In this section I'll cover briefly the role of Director and give some advice on running a successful game of the Agency.

Scenarios

Part of the Director's job is to come up with a plot outline, the scenario into which the player characters will be put. Plot outlines are a basic framework upon which you and your players can build when playing the game. Because the game is fairly freeform, and often allows a great deal of player control, the plot should be allowed to develop through play, rather than be created entirely before hand. All that is really needed is a solid concept of what is going on, which you can build upon during play. As a Director you may have to do some quick thinking to meld player ideas into events in the scenario, but you'll often find that running with player introduced ideas can produce more entertaining results than what you originally envisioned.

The easiest place to begin is to just come up with some bizarre supernatural threat to the nation. Maybe a secret society of vampires is kidnapping politicians, Russian spies are raising zombies to overthrow the state or a band of cultists have managed to steal some nuclear weapons and hold the country for ransom. What works well in The Agency is a juxtaposition of ideas, things that wouldn't initially seem to fit, but that when joined together are quite amusing. Scenarios should be a mix of the surreal, macabre, comedic, and action packed.

In its most basic form, simply come up with 1) what the Agency knows and 2) what's actually going on, then set the players loose to investigate. If you suffer from a dearth of ideas, simply watch your favourite sixties or seventies style adventure show (some are detailed in the inspirations section) and change the villains to evil supernatural creatures.

Scenarios Seeds

The Hex Norton Horror

Hook: The players are on a well earned break at the Health Spa in Hex Norton, but strange things are afoot in the village. The locals all seem terribly odd...

What's going on: The evil F.E.S.T.A has set up a secret base in the village and is attempting to raise an Eldritch Horror.

Likely Events: Encounters with obscure local folk who seem suspicious but are really just plain odd. F.E.S.T.A. agents causing problems in the local pub, leading to a bar fight. F.E.S.T.A agents breaking into a local curiosity shop and stealing some mysterious old knick-knack. A strange and unearthly eldritch horror chasing Yorkshire farmers through the fields. The characters and villagers holed up in the inn as tentacles slowly start to pour through the doors and windows.

You only live for ever

Hook: An alarming number of MI5 agents have been going missing, snatched from their missions by a mysterious source.

What's going on: Jacob Swain, a rogue agent turned vampire, has begun setting up his own secret organisation. He offers his former comrades the choice of joining him as vampires, or dying.

Likely Events: Players setting up a trap by spying on as yet unaffected agents (cue hilarity as the MI5 agents mistake them for Russians). One of the players is approached by Swain as a possible convert. Swain sends his vampire goons to make things difficult for the characters.

In too deep

Hook: A member of parliament is discovered dead on the beach, but he was seen over a hundred miles away shortly before his death.

What's going on: Fish Demons are infiltrating the House of Commons and replacing the MPs with cunningly disguised doubles.

Likely events: Meeting the witness. Meeting slimy politicians. The witness and the characters being attacked by sea monster goons from the sewers. Tracking the goons to a secret base in the sewers. Attacking the sea monsters' underground lair.

Series

A series is a group of interlinked scenarios featuring the same group of characters. It's a chance for characters' personalities and relationships to develop over a series of scenarios, for echoes of future events to be hidden in earlier times, and for in-jokes to become rife.

The Agency contains no detailed system for character advancement. It's not that kind of game, and it's not really true to the inspiration. If you are running games where characters go from scenario to scenario, Karma should get reset at the end of each session. You can also get each player to justify getting a bonus point of Karma for next time, by reminding the group of something particularly cool their character did that session.

You may find that players who acquire mystic artefacts, lavish riches or books of spells wish to keep them. Let them! You can hang interesting plots off them in the future. All such acquisitions come with an associated price, and that price will be a flaw that balances the bonus they grant, as chosen by the player. This may not seem fair, but it does make things interesting (and that's what we want!), and justifying the flaw can make for interesting character developments.

***Example:** Agent Jones finds a book of spells, used by a F.E.S.T.A. sorcerer. He experiments with the book and comes to a rudimentary understanding of some of the spells. Unfortunately this new found power doesn't sit well with him, and he becomes increasingly insufferable around people. He has gained the egotistical flaw.*

Villains

Part of the Director's job is to create and control the characters' enemies. Since the player characters are going to interact with them, then some traits like those used to define characters are useful. In order to make the job easier, villains can be roughly divided into three categories: Goons, Minions and Bosses.

Goons

Goons have only 6 scratches and down as damage levels. You won't have to detail too much of these villains' capabilities, as they're not really too important to the plot. They are the faceless extras who show up to hinder the characters' efforts, the guys in boiler suits in that secret mountain fortress, the street thugs sent round to rough up the characters when they get too close.

Sample Goon: *Man in Red Boiler suit.*

Description: *Man in Red Boiler Suit*

Personality: *Weak willed*

Skills: *Poor Brawl (2), Good Run for life (5), Good Blabber for life (5)*

Quote: *"I'll tell you anything, just let me go!"*

Minions

Minions are the flunkies of the bosses. They are second-in-commands or minor villains. Include basic skills (2 good 1, poor) and character wound levels when creating them. Try to give them a few personality quirks, and maybe bonuses and flaws too. Minions tend to lead groups of goons and escape when the going gets too difficult for them.

Sample Minion: *Oscar Hemmington, upper class cultist*

Description: *Well-dressed*

Personality: *Suave, sophisticated, unhinged, inbred*

Skills: *Good Socialise (5), Good Fencing (5), Poor Intimidation (2)*

Bonus: *Wealthy*

Flaw: *Gloating*

Quote: *"You've interfered with the wrong people. Father will be so upset, those stains take ages to wash out."*

Bosses

Bosses should be as fleshed out as possible, as they are the bad guys behind evil plots. They should have skills, wounds, bonuses and flaws similar to a players character. Consider their motivations, as such antagonists are always more interesting if their motivations are understandable. Bosses will often have multiple bonuses and flaws.

Sample Boss:

Description: *A slightly overweight, bald man in an ill-fitting white suit, smokes roll-up cigarettes. Fletcher is the London underworld's occult kingpin. If it's of dubious origin, it's likely passed through his hands at some point. So far his excellent lawyers, and his hands off approach, have made it difficult for the Agency to pin anything on him.*

Personality: *Sleazy, determined, considerate, vengeful*

Skills: *Good Firearms (5), Good Occult Knowledge (5), Excellent Deal Making (6), Poor Athletics (2)*

Bonuses: *Wealthy, Contacts*

Flaws: *Incompetent Minions, Easily Distracted*

Villains and Karma

Villains are affected by Karma too. They can use their own good Karma to invoke their bonus.

Also, If a player' character has bad Karma, then the Director can give the player a point of Good Karma. It's not for free though, this gain in Karma comes at the cost of the villain being able to use his bonus.

Villains also have flaws. Players can ask to invoke these at any time, and the villain gains a point of Karma to use at a later date. It's often worth leaving a villain's exact flaws undecided and letting players suggest one that would be appropriate when they try and invoke it.

You should give all villains one or two free points of Karma, so that they have a chance to make use of their bonuses before being overwhelmed by the onslaught of the player's characters.

Villainous Bonuses:

Villains have access to the majority of the bonuses available to heroes, as well as the following:

Aura of importance- Invoke this bonus to allow a villain to keep people talking to him rather than attacking him.

Well-respected gentleman- For some reason people believe the villain to be innocent. Invoke this bonus for normal people to ignore the blatant evils of the villain in question.

Planned escape route- The villain in question has planned in such minute detail his life that he can escape from almost any situation from inside his base.

Villainous Flaws:

Merciful- The villain will choose to be merciful 'just this once', and spare the characters lives when he could kill them.

Gloating- The villain will gloat about his plans to the characters, even if it's not in his best interest.

Incompetent Minions- This flaw can be invoked to cause the villain's followers to be grossly incompetent. The minions might fail to tie up the characters, leave the secret base door open, and so on.

Easily Distracted- The villain will be distracted by some minor problem, instead of focusing on the threat of the characters.

Duellist- The villain will nominate to fight one individual character in a duel rather than mob the group with goons.

Supernatural Antagonists

Agents will often come across weird supernatural creatures and occurrences. Here are a few examples of how these antagonists can be dealt with in game terms.

Vampires

Vampires should have normal human damage boxes but take half damage from attacks not made with fire, garlic, sunlight, or crosses. A stake through the heart will revert a vampire to a corpse (of the appropriate age), but requires an expenditure of Karma to succeed in combat. This stays in effect until the stake is removed. Vampires are armed with weird mind-affecting powers and are the evil plotters behind schemes: Blofeld with fangs.

Mind-affecting powers should be rolled as a skill at either good or excellent (depending on the age of the vampire). Typically they can be used to force others to obey the vampire's will. Other

vampires may have the ability to turn into animals or mist, maybe even fly. Vampires can grapple people in combat, so they can feed (a point of Karma is spent to drink). For every point of damage done in this way, they can heal a scratch. Vampires also have the supernatural strength bonus, which allows them to do +8 damage by taking a point of bad Karma.

Inexperienced Vampire

Description: Tall, thin, and dressed in the latest fashions, conveying a feel of aloof mystery.

Personality: A domineering and cultured megalomaniac

Skills: Control Mind (good), Brawl (good), Persuasion (good)

Bonuses: Blood Sustenance, Supernatural Strength, Well Respected Gentleman

Flaws: Duelist, Sun Allergy, Staking Problem

Experienced Vampire

Description: Tall, thin, and dressed in outdated fashions, conveying an feel of aloof mystery and eccentricity.

Personality: A domineering and cultured megalomaniac

Skills: Control Mind (Excellent), Brawl(good), Persuasion(excellent), Technology(poor), Current Affairs(poor)

Bonuses: Blood sustenance, Supernatural Strength, Well Respected Gentleman, Wealth

Flaws: Duellist, Sun Allergy, Staking Problem, Incompetent Minions

Zombies

Zombies have double normal human scratches (10) and should take no wound penalties, though bits of them will drop off with each wound taken. They suffer from an automatic -2 to awareness for being slow and shambling (yes, they can be automatically dazed). They should have one or two skills (physical only, really). It is left up to individual Directors what happens when a zombie bites a character.

Typical Zombie

Description: Decaying.

Personality: Brains!

Skills: Brawl (good), Find Spicy Brains (good)

Bonuses: None

Flaws: Shambling

Werewolves

Werewolves have normal human health levels. They can spend Karma to enter a wolf-man state, where they take half damage from anything but silver or mystic items. In human form, they have normal skills. When in man-wolf form they gain +2 to any physical skills they might have, and -1 to all mental or social skills. All werewolves suffer from the additional flaw of easily enraged.

Typical Werewolf

Description: Furry mass of teeth and claws / confused human.

Personality: Angry

Skills: Brawl(Excellent), Tracking (good), Appropriate Human Skill (good)

Bonuses: Wolfman Form

Flaws: Easily Enraged

Mummies

Mummies take half damage from everything except fire or mystic items, both of which do double damage. They are armed with mysterious Egyptian spells, which summon strange weather, control minds or create hordes of man-eating scarabs. Typically these spells will use weird

ingredients (like mummified crocodile tongues), which are used up when the spell is cast. Spells require a point of Karma to work.

ImNaTen

Description: Looming figure wrapped in burial shroud, carrying an ankh and a sceptre.

Personality: Angry. Sleepy. Missing his lost wife.

Skills: Melee (Excellent) , Mind Control (good)

Bonuses: Egyptian Magic

Flaws: Fear of Fire

Sorcerers

Sorcerers should have many strange and magical devices, as well as spells. Typically spells require a great amount of preparation time and weird occult ingredients. Use of magical devices or spells for instant/unprepared effects requires them to take a point of bad Karma. Sorcerers will often have a variety of bound supernatural creatures as allies, and small, hunchbacked servants. Use the sample villain information for sorcerers' skills.

Ghosts

Ghosts have no physical bodies and have to possess humans in order to do anything. This requires a difficult roll using their possessing skill. Characters with the Mysticism bonus can sense spirits and invoke their Mysticism bonus to see them or attempt to exorcise them. Ghosts can manifest, but it is a tremendously difficult task and requires the expenditure of a Karma point. They have skills equivalent to when they were alive, with a level similar to a goon or minion..

Eldritch Horrors

Eldritch horrors are Lovecraftian things from beyond the bounds of the universe. They tend to make a mess. They have tentacles and bloated bodies, with a few too many dimensions for their own good. They should be treated as having bonus dice in combat due to size and should take larger numbers of scratches per wound (15 or so). Eldritch horrors have their own agendas, beyond the ken of mortal man, though they often seem to be motivated by hunger.

Thing from beyond space

Description: Mass of odd angles and tentacles

Personality: Unknown, but slobbering

Skills: Attack with Tentacle (Excellent) , Break Things (Good), Make People Afraid (Good)

Bonus: Drive character temporarily insane

Flaw: Unable to pass into confined spaces

Looking for Inspiration?

The Agency draws inspiration from sixties' and seventies' secret agent films and TV shows. Things like *The Avengers*, *The Saint*, *The Prisoner*, *James Bond*, *The Persuaders*, *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *The Champions* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*. A quick web search should put you on to information about all of these, and most have DVD/Video sets available. For a loving parody, the original Austin Powers is worth a look, too. For the horror elements, I suggest a look at anything in the Hammer back catalogue.

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